AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently amended) A method of treating a precursor, the precursor comprising a substrate and an imageable coating on the substrate, the imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition, the method comprising the step of heat-treating the precursor under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from ~~substantially the entire surface area of the imageable coating~~ the precursor, wherein heat-treating includes holding the precursor at a temperature of about 40° C or above for at least 12 hours.

2. (Currently amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the ~~polymeric composition~~ imageable coating is ~~positive working~~ positive-working.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the polymeric composition includes a polymer having hydroxyl groups.

4. (Original) The method of claim 2, wherein the polymeric composition includes a polymer selected from a phenolic resin and a poly(hydroxystyrene) resin.

5. (Original) The method of claim 3, wherein the polymeric composition includes a novolak resin.

6. (Previously presented) The method of claim 3, wherein the glass transition temperature of the polymeric composition is not exceeded during heat-treating of the precursor.

7. (Cancelled)

8. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of heat-treating includes holding the precursor at a temperature in the range 40-90° C, for at least 12 hours.

9. (Previously presented) A method of treating a precursor in a precursor coil, the precursor comprising a substrate and an imageable coating on the substrate, the imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition, the method comprising the step of heat-treating the precursor coil under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor.

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10. (Previously presented) A method of treating a precursor in a stack of precursors, the precursor comprising a substrate and an imageable coating on the substrate, the imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition, the method comprising the step of heat-treating the stack of precursors under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture from the precursor, wherein the stack comprises at least ten such precursors.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the removal of moisture is inhibited by wrapping or encasing the precursor in a substantially water-impermeable material.

12. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of heat-treating is carried out in an environment having a relative humidity of at least about 25%.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the coating is such that its solubility in a developer is not increased by incident UV radiation.

14. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the imageable coating is such that it may be patternwise imaged by direct heat; or by indirect heat from charged particle radiation or electromagnetic radiation converted to heat by the coating.

15. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the imageable coating comprises a radiation-absorbing compound able to absorb electromagnetic radiation entirely or predominantly in the range 600 to 1400 nm and convert it to heat.

16. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the imageable coating comprises insolubilizer means which acts to inhibit the dissolution of the coating in a developer prior to imaging.

17. (Currently amended) A method for providing a printing form precursor, comprising: (a) providing on a substrate an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition; and (b) heat-treating the imageable coating at a temperature of about 40° C or above for at least 12 hours, under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture ~~from substantially the entire surface area of the imageable coating~~; to provide the printing form precursor.

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18. (Previously presented) A method for providing an electronic part precursor, comprising: (a) providing on a substrate an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition and (b) heat-treating the imageable coating at a temperature of about 40° C or above for at least 12 hours, under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture ~~from substantially the entire surface area of the imageable coating~~; to provide the electronic part precursor.

19. (Currently amended) A ~~positive working~~ positive-working lithographic printing form precursor produced by a method comprising: (a) providing on a substrate a ~~positive working~~ positive-working imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition and (b) heat-treating the imageable coating at a temperature of about 40° C or above for at least 12 hours, under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture ~~from substantially the entire surface area of the imageable coating~~; to provide the printing form precursor.

20. (Currently amended) An electronic part precursor produced by a method comprising: (a) providing on a substrate an imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition and (b) heat-treating the imageable coating at a temperature of about 40° C or above for at least 12 hours, under conditions which inhibit the removal of moisture ~~from substantially the entire surface area of the imageable coating~~; to provide the electronic part precursor.

21. (Currently amended) A method for producing an imaged article, comprising:

(a) providing a precursor having an imageable coating on a substrate, the imageable coating including a polymeric composition;

(b) heat-treating the precursor at a temperature of about 40° C or above for at least 12 hours, such that the removal of moisture from ~~substantially the entire surface area of the imageable coating~~ the precursor during heat-treating is inhibited;

(c) imagewise exposing the coating; and

(d) contacting the exposed coating with an aqueous developer, to produce the imaged article.

22. (Currently amended) The method of claim 10, wherein the ~~polymeric composition~~ imageable coating is ~~positive working~~ positive-working.

23. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the polymeric composition includes a polymer having hydroxyl groups.

24. (Original) The method of claim 22, wherein the polymeric composition includes a polymer selected from a phenolic resin and a poly(hydroxystyrene) resin.

25. (Original) The method of claim 23, wherein the polymeric composition includes a novolak resin.

26. (Previously presented) The method of claim 23, wherein the glass transition temperature of the polymeric composition is not exceeded in the heat treatment.

27. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the step of heat-treating includes holding the stack of precursors at a temperature of about 40° C or above, for at least 12 hours.

28. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the step of heat-treating includes holding the stack of precursors at a temperature in the range 40-90° C.

29. (Cancelled)

30. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the removal of moisture is inhibited by wrapping or encasing the precursor in a substantially water-impermeable material.

31. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the step of heat-treating is carried out in an environment having a relative humidity of at least about 25%.

32. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein the coating is such that its solubility in a developer is not increased by incident UV radiation.

33. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the imageable coating is such that it may be patternwise imaged by direct heat; or by indirect heat from charged particle radiation or electromagnetic radiation converted to heat by the coating.

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34. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the imageable coating comprises a radiation-absorbing compound able to absorb electromagnetic radiation entirely or predominantly in the range 600 to 1400 nm and convert it to heat.

35. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10 wherein the imageable coating comprises insolubilizer means which acts to inhibit the dissolution of the coating in a developer prior to imaging.

36. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the precursor is a printing form precursor.

37. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the precursor is an electronic part precursor.

38. (Cancelled)

39. (Cancelled)

40. (Previously presented) A method for producing an imaged article, comprising:

(a) providing a precursor having an imageable coating on a substrate, the imageable coating comprising a polymeric composition;

(b) heat-treating the precursor among a stack of at least ten such precursors, such that the removal of moisture from the precursor is inhibited;

(b) imagewise exposing the imageable coating; and

(c) contacting the exposed imageable coating with an aqueous developer, to produce the imaged article.

41. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of heat-treating includes holding the precursor at a temperature of about 55° C, for at least 12 hours.

42. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of heat-treating is carried out in an environment having a relative humidity of about 35%.

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43. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the step of heat-treating includes holding the stack of precursors at a temperature of about 55° C, for at least 12 hours.

44. (Previously presented) The method of claim 10, wherein the step of heat-treating is carried out in an environment having a relative humidity of about 35%.

45. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the material is a polythene film.

46. (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the material is a metallized polyester tape.

47. (Previously presented) The method of claim 21, wherein the imaged article is a printing form.

48. (Previously presented) The method of claim 30, wherein the material is a polythene film.

49. (Previously presented) The method of claim 30, wherein the material is a metallized polyester tape.

50. (Previously presented) The method of claim 40, wherein the imaged article is a printing form.

51. (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the precursor is in a stack of precursors to be treated, and the step of heat-treating is applied to the stack.

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